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outposts

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VERNON SCANNELL

The Bright Days

IN the dark days, the days that smell of ink,
When murderers were crowned and venerated,
The poor were born in atavistic stink,
And lepers rang their bells and celebrated.

In the harsh days, our books and teachers say,
Death's appetite was bigger than the sky;
His favourite dish on each and every day
Was babies in a melancholy pie.

And yet each generation had its seers,
Philosophers and poets who foretold,
Despite the multitude's derisive jeers,
A time would come when none would want for gold;

When every single creature born of man
Would eat good food and rest on certain days,
And every child be taught the gift to scan
Flowers of wisdom in a field of praise.

In the bright days, the days we now enjoy,
The visionary promises have grown
Real as a wife to some romantic boy,
But the poets and the bankrupt dreamers moan.

As scientist and clown conspire to make
Tolerable the deserts of our leisure,
Feeding the bleating millions on sweet cake,
And herding them to laughter and sad pleasure.

EWART MILNE

Portrait of a Lady

POOR body, after all your wild embracing,
Is there no one now would put you pitying to bed?
And if one did, would you not lie quietly, stillly,
Your reed stems broken, and all your hot fires dead?
Did poets say these burnt-out orbs had sparkling beauty,
Or praise these sagging lines of thigh and throat
and head?
Ah, as your life was love, were you by love defeated,
Or by your lovers fear to face the life
you would have bred?
What could you do but do what they did, poor body:
Become expert at evasion, accept the less and shoddy —
Man's ruined universe, his crumbling leaven,
The hell he loved, his cursed and hated Heaven —
Is there now, stirring anywhere among the bones
that frame you,
A will to peel this fading flesh from knee and
joint and throat?
A spirit to stand erect without a shred to cover you:
To stand, and laugh at every wind
would ride a roundabout.

MARGARET RHODES

Points of View

WE saw tawny palaces, towers and campaniles
And spires soaring to heaven at a bound:
The child saw only a lizard as still as a stone
Sunning itself on the ground.

We saw white houses with filigree balconies
Spilling a summer of flowers in the sleeping heat:
The child saw a tousled songbird in a cage
Above the narrow street.

We saw groves of olives and the gnarled fingers of vines
And noonday shimmering like water on the road:
The child saw only a donkey's plodding hooves
Beneath its panniered load.
We came reluctant home, to wrest weeds from the garden,
To open the windows and chivvy cobwebs from the house:
But the child came singing, wild with anticipation,
Back to a tame white mouse.

GORDON HARRIS

The Flowering Flame

A PART from these few joys
Abounds no fullness,
Late sunlight and the body's kiss,
The splendour of a penny gift
Ruled rich by child's delight . . .
A rare unquestioning.
Few solaces endure apart from these.
Except from wounded lips,
Falls no forgiveness,
Wounds heal and then resentments start.
Above the voice of murder
And the loud appeal
The dove's tribunal argues in the heart.
Across the sunlight's edge
Remains a calmness,
Emblem of olive on the conqueror's tomb.
While, rich in the rib as Adam,
The ecstatic child
Bears in his hands the frail, the flowering flame.

NOEL WELCH

Nativity

THE town is buried, we alone exist ;
Snow, more than smooth linen, detaches
And conceals. Few yet know of you
And they cannot leave to proclaim your birth
Nor one reach us to enquire your name

Or parent you with any likeness.
To me you are not like anyone,
Least myself. Hard to realize two brief
Hours ago you were subject to this flesh,
Who now confront me with your own tender
But impenetrable walls that disclose
Nothing unless the will to live.

What is birth? A complete separation ;
But the snow in mercy drifts and still
The sky is dark. Oh ideal time that gives
You an anonymous interim
Not mine, not yet the world's, your own simply,
Recent as the flakes along the sill

And for the moment as silent. But
In this white abstraction is there treason.
On what impulse greater than myself
Did I pull such brightness down. Are you
To my negations Heaven's soft reply,
Or did my one wild *yes* contain the tree.

Where at last my fear must hang, while you
Try your strength in its outrageous arms
To see if in leafless boughs you can still
Love the earth, and lift it across
Lengthening limbs to the green place from which
Oh man, oh God forgive, I brought you down.

But before retreating snow brings us
As audience the simple and the wise,
Let me assuage your hunger and for
A while console the cries that soon
Must eternally exceed my reach. Time
Enough for fear. Joy now and milky peace.

LOUIS JOHNSON

The Signs

WHAT symbols choose?
The chisel and the spade
Are there to use;
Sign what the hand has made.

The clock and tray
To mark the hours
Served by the day
For loud domestic powers.

The match and cup —
To light the cigarette
Or quietly sip
Warm comfort in regret.

Or paint a card
“Do not disturb.”
However hard
Habit may try to curb

And quell alarms —
Or draw the curtain when
Disturbance comes
Dressed in a neighbour's pain.

New Zealand.

PAUL GREENE

The Castaway

DAY and night a myriad sea-birds crying,
Arch the elusive isle, and seas mercurial
Lash the votive rock where your bones are lying,
Asking for burial.

I, the stranger digging your grave, have sought you,
Bearing a spade and shroud as for a brother ;
Reverently into the jaws that caught you
Ventures another :

Here, where the jutting brow of drowned Atlantis
Rears your whitening bones to the sunset's glory,
Only Destiny and the Praying Mantis
Treasure your story.

From the torn ship's foundering desolation
Harrying waves cast you upon the island,
Shouting the meagre invoice of salvation —
Life, and the dry land.

Bound by breakers, life was a limb to blacken ;
Then you saw the monolith's towering profile,
Saw with kindling hope the means to beckon
Passage from exile :

Through the island, tightening its possession,
Empty sea-shells sang to their echoing sisters,
Narrowing ethnic reveries to obsession,
Opening vistas :

Till, with glittering mind and reason brittle,
You from igneous rock chiselled a suppliant,
Patiently out of volcano's spittle
Fathered a giant.

Life is lonely, life is a private hour ;
We to each semaphore with gestures human ;
You with a pride of stone, a shaft of power,
Signed as no true man :

Men have seen it, driven on stumbling courses,
Seen the glowing eyes as the morning lightened,
Seen the risen form of forbidden forces,
Seen and were frightened.

To the Carven One where the seabirds hover
I alone have come, a belated friend,
Offering in aftertime this earthen cover,
Gift for a legend.

Evening takes the isle and its alien blossom ;
Rock and cavern, full of the wind's elation,
Moan ; and like a voice from the macrocosm
Speaks your creation.

Is it enough then to have been a maker ?
Listen, you white bones lying there on the bluff :
Do you hear the reiteration of the breaker ?—
'It is enough !'

LINCOLN FITZELL

To the Captains

TIME, the skip-rock in the stream
Of our daily dust and dream,
Offers us to swirl of change,
The river's teeth, the rifle's range.

Raw wounds of a world unhealed,
Stain the air of town and field,
And nations sigh as nettles dart,
And wild injustice stings the heart.

U.S.A.

RICHARD KELL

Ode in Memory of Jean Francois Gravelet, called Blondin
(1824—1897)

These foolhardy exhibitions drew
some ten thousand persons to
witness the result. The facts
appear to be so well attested, that
they deserve mention as a record
of extraordinary folly.

Daily Telegraph, 31st Aug., 1859

WHAT do we think now of the Seven Natural Wonders!
Niagara has nothing to match your skill:
That huge splayed energy is inept as fat
Beside the strength whose terse and accurate jets
Could thread the eyes of needles. We have no comment
Equal to the occasion; more eloquent of amazement
The questions we would ask, though half suspecting
You would evade them, blind our understanding
With coloured flares of esoteric wisdom.

Are you exempt from fear, never to flinch
Knowing that a second from now your foot may skid
Or a twitch of wind sway you the final fraction
Into the arc of death? Are you superconscious,
Keen as a turning diamond in the minute
Adjustments of your artistry—or entranced
And vested with infallibility
Like the somnambulist on the windowsill?—
Unaware of sunlight and cool air
And steamboats holding their breath; of multitudes
Legendary and silent attending miracles;
And drumming water, a precipice of foam
Crumbling away like dynamited chalk.

I think that you would laugh and say our minds
Were fluffy and whimsical; that your manoeuvres
Derive from no arcanum, but demonstrate
A rational and lucid gaiety.

So you extemporise on homely themes —
Trundle a wheelbarrow, bundle yourself in a sack,
Stalk on a pair of stilts; and to clinch the matter
You cook us an omelette and lower it on to a steamboat.

Ten thousand taut stares—and you poised at their vertex!
Puppet-master, gentle, omnipotent,
You hold us by those lightly tugging strings.
Like a dramatic chorus you present us
Exposed to one momentous circumstance,
Delineating man's complexity.

Let us admit the craving for sensation
And orgies of vicarious adventure;
The envy sizing up your power and pride;
Even the sense of horror which would suck
A curious pleasure from catastrophe.
And yet, a moment after you had fallen
We'd wish to see you saved and reinstated.
Above all else we praise and cherish you
As steel and flint would praise the thunderstorm:
Your lightning is the splendid thrust which makes
A laughing-stock of death; we tip and run.

Showman you are, daredevil, virtuoso;
Greedy—who knows?—for money and applause.
These things we take for granted, but as part
And parcel of your genius.

The casual prodigies which you perform
Are not explained by motives so banal:
Mere egotism had surer ways to choose;
Only vocation could afford to take
Those skyhigh risks, and then to ask from danger
And skill's decisive act a pure delight.

Almost we see you fashioned for a strange
Provoking destiny: to celebrate,
By your most delicate and courageous art,
The clarity that blurs with routine boredom,
The grace and daring dreamed but unachieved.

I wish you the best of luck. May you tread
your nimble highway
A thousand times and live your seventy years.
And may you die in your bed of a bad cold, confounding
The owl-wise oracles who have called you fool.

EDWIN BROCK

A Kind of Truth

—My soul waiteth still upon God;
for of Him cometh my salvation—

TODAY five fingers failed upon a stone;
And still the ships weep out and stay away;
We count the cuts that measure to the bone.

Though sharpened to a shriek, it was a groan
That swept the seas and gave the game away;
Today five fingers failed upon a stone.

And two by two the numbered dead atone
For dying. And silently the living stay
To count the cuts that measure to the bone.

But this is less than mornings I have known
That spilt the ground with promises of day
And watched its fingers fail upon a stone.

And still to try and finally to own
To nothing that will hold a will at bay,
To count the cuts that measure to the bone.

All this, in living, has been finely sewn
Into a face that wills towards decay
With fingers that have failed upon a stone
And cuts that counted measure to the bone,

PHOEBE HESKETH

Cover Your Eyes

THERE'S a way of looking at things broadside on
With the flat of the eyes
Seeing the coloured surface but never the bone
Beneath the skin.
This way of looking shows a tree or stone
Without surprise
As merely itself, a factual image thrown
On the faithful retina.

And there's a way of looking in
Beyond the probe of sight to rediscover
The lost original
That has no other shape, no counterfeit.
Cover your eyes—a childhood game will show
Truth shining through the blindness of deceit.

ROY McFADDEN

Synge in Paris

ON the Pont de la Concorde between the mad
Skelping traffic and the well-bred river
Leisurely strolling across the flashing city,
He watched from a jap of shadow, his book unread,
The mule-like pleasure-boats, and shell-skinned girls
With pouting breasts and seaweed-buoyant skirts;
Above, the flag of France, stiff, head in air:
And there at his feet twin leaves in the wind, like curls.
But, unabsorbed, unbreached, his foreign mind
Grey as Irish drizzle, sceptical
Of too much sunshine, clung tight like a cloud
Over the city, schooled in the ways of the wind;
Remembering flooded fields and the broken harbour wall.

Northern Ireland

JOHN CASPALL

Warden Hill

(The site of many discoveries of archaeological interest.)

UPON this sudden tilting hill,
An angry wind propels the birds,
Like barbs across the hissing trees,
And where a lifted hand obscures
The sly momentum of the streets,
The fields in gradual labour lie.

Interred beneath the tidal grass,
And known by silence, brass and bone,
The broken relics disregard
Obdurate Time and crowding moons.
Whilst lovers tread their futures out
Above their compeer's cambered skulls.

Outspread before the scything owl
The sharp horizons slope away
To Time, attending current acts
Behind the windows' kindled space.
Where earth has quenched the gentler things,
The dog-rose hangs its wan bouquet.

DEE WALKER

The Trail is a Trick

BACK over the years
I recall my trails
Salted with tears,
Twisted by gales.

In truth I quote
This lad of speed
Wrote a book,
Fashioned a creed.

My body has lain
On a boxcar dome,
A tramp on a train
Learning to roam.

When years were long
Time was a test,
Money a song,
Life a jest.

When the earth is quick
It's ready for sowing;
The trail is a trick,
But it's time for hoeing.

U.S.A.

ROBERT WALLER

Others May Hold Your Body

OTHERS may hold your body in their hands like a book,
Incomprehension in their eyes and their stiff fingers
Unable to turn a page.
They cannot read the secrets of your look.
Though longing to possess you
And sighing with hope and rage
Bruising perhaps the flesh that binds your secret
They shall never interpret
The innumerable strange signs.
They are illiterate.

LANDRETH E. LEAPER

The Chemistry Lesson

THE golden hands take up the crystals and mask.
Behind the periodic glass of books
Colour panics up and down the scale ;
The schoolgirl throws with transparent looks
A mineral light upon her passionate game,
And makes herself, by secret lessons, a page
Of celestial images. And still the mistress dusts
Invisible boards, in the dust of the noon's age.
Where the ammonia in discreet solution
Breathes a liquid precipitate, the girls retreat
To silence, and to the waiting desire,
Unending in its deserts, but complete.

ALAN SILLITOE

Guide to the Tiflis Railway

THE witnessed scenery now changes
To naked cliffs and bibulous trees
(In place of wooded slopes, and freedom
To drink fresh water to the lees).
Parched and monotonous hill country :
Dare anyone stand up and stop the train?
Perhaps one will observe what can be seen :
A young priest blessing a dissected brain.
Hardly visible from the railway
A deep ravine spits out its endless bile,
We cross the river and notice on the left
Various vertical caves in Gothic style.

Which afforded refuge to the Christians,
Sparse and lean (a rouble to the guide)
Against the Mongols and the Persians
Who swam the lake like cats at eventide ;

Who one time sent three gifts from Samarkand
Of ancient sunlight to a frugal feast :
Now reaping a return with scarlet swords
From the full belly of the golden east.

Our train proceeds : unfolds an arrowmark of bones,
The valley widens, easy to foretell
That crossing the military road we soon
Reach the city and look up the best hotel.

Spain

CELIA RANDALL

Boy into Heron

HIGH on a stilt-raised bed above the reeds
He lay and watched the birds, saw the
grey heron come,
Perched like himself on long stiff legs,
To search the mud wet shore for frogs and fish,
Marked his grey plumage and the deep-slate tail,
And the dark coronet of glossy plumes,
And, watching so intently, lost himself,
His own identity merged in the bird's.
And when the heron rose above the lough,
His long legs arrowed in the wind,
His plumes laid flat, the boy took wings,
And rose with him and skimmed across the lake,
And knew the majesty and joy of flight,
Not till the heron grew a distant speck
Beyond his sight, did he, reluctant, creep
Into his body's wingless form again.

Northern Ireland.

GEOFFREY HOLLOWAY

Warning to Aesthetes

BEWARE. This ecstasy that's river-wrought,
this cold fluency (too subtle to be caught)
where the bland bough planchette-pencils
may yet resolve upon
your epitaph.

Beware: sharing that streamlined paradise
— the prowess, in reflective skies,
of sleek waterweed, the white lies
of tied crowfoot and the lotus-bloom —
you'll miss the shallowness that's nearer home:

the snags, grit, the necessary stone
by which the innocence of dense bone
learns living, how to stoutly tread,
articulate, against
the spite, the scrambled foam.

Beware. Yours is no swansdown craft,
no choreographic spider-gift
for shifting between sharp mouths;
no Christ-cool knack of ripple-ranging
painlessly, without loss. . .

Beware. In that suave tree
whose maze invites your classic envy
princes lie: deepest yet
that legend with the devastating hair. . . .
Absalom, the shattered sun.

REVIEWS

The Collected Poems of Francis Carey Slater (Blackwoods, 12s 6d.)

IN his preface to *The Collected Poems of Francis Carey Slater*, Mr. Roy Campbell leaves a fitting acknowledgment of his own debt to the older poet (and fellow-countryman) who has survived him and, at the same time, emphasizes the difficulties, "the long age of indifference and neglect which had to be weathered by Dr. Slater when he first acclimatized English poetry to these shores as the forerunner and pioneer of us all." There can be little doubt that, since the official recognition of Afrikaans, the rapid development and increasing popularity of Afrikaans poetry in South Africa has had a most unfortunate effect upon South African poetry in English. It is not to disparage such poets as Celliers, Leipoldt and Totius, to say that national sentiment in a white community possessing a majority of Dutch descent has encouraged Afrikaans poetry simply because it employs the Afrikaans tongue. On the other hand, the English-speaking inhabitants have failed to support their own poets with equal enthusiasm.

This lack of a local public has been a major obstacle to English-speaking poets in South Africa. Regular publication and reliable criticism are essential to the development of poetry; and in South Africa there has been a serious dearth of periodicals which cater for either poetry or criticism. There is not at present, to my knowledge, a single magazine devoted to poetry. It is not surprising that some of the most outstanding poets have felt compelled to leave their country—Roy Campbell, William Plomer, F. T. Prince, David Wright, Charles Madge, R. N. Currey and Roy MacNab.

Moreover, as the Afrikaans poets became more aggressively South African in the exploitation of their language, the writers in English tended to isolate themselves and, in reaction to Afrikaans ideas, to fall back upon the literary traditions of Britain at a time when they would normally have been laying the foundations of an authentic South African culture. Seen in this light the achievement of Francis Carey Slater is even more remarkable, for it was not until poets like Slater and Campbell emerged to break down the growing isolation and utter dependence upon British traditions that any advance towards an indigenous poetry was made.

Slater is one of the few poets South Africa has yet produced whose work is rich enough in potentiality to exercise a vital influence. Born and brought up in South Africa, with every sense-memory stored with the impressions made upon a sensitive mind, he speaks the authentic language of his country. If, like so many of

his contemporaries, in the early stages of his career he made a somewhat incongruous attempt to combine local imagery with the ideas and diction of the English Romantic and Victorian poets, he has since developed an individual style appropriate to the thoughts and emotions he seeks to convey. Whatever the merits or demerits of his work, it can truly be said that he has blazed the trail for his successors.

Although Dr. Slater has written at least ten volumes of poetry, his *Collected Poems* contains all that he wishes to retain. In the opening section, *Dark Folk*, almost every aspect of native life is covered—traditions and folk-lore, labour in the fields and mines, life in the kraal, working chants, laments and lullabies. *Abakweta Dance*, for instance, celebrates the ceremonial dance of the young Xhosa males during the period of retreat devoted to the rites of circumcision. In *Langa's Lament for Lila* there is an element of folk-lore which has its European parallel in the Eurydice myth, though Lila is, in fact, an archetypal figure belonging to the seasonal cycle peculiar to South Africa (a rain goddess) and this short poem is the tribe's lament for her disappearance from a land where drought can cause such hardship and suffering.

In the later section (though written earlier) entitled *Drought*, Slater uses the rain and drought images with striking effect in a closely-linked series of lyrics in unrhymed irregular verse. The method here is one of cumulative presentation, each poem taking up the theme for further development, each making its essential contribution to the whole sequence.

The Trek, separately published in 1938, is a magnificent conception and, instinct with life and true historical insight, is rightly handled on the generous lines of an epic. As its title implies, this long poem is concerned with one of the most significant events in the shaping of South African history, the Great Trek of the Boers. If it can be regarded as a romantic affirmation of the human spirit, it also provides typical examples of petty-mindedness, selfishness, disloyalty, lack of vision and purpose. Slater has resisted the temptation to glamorize his story and so present a false picture. Through his realistic yet imaginative interpretation, bringing out the cross-currents of feeling, the personal conflicts and hand-to-mouth improvisations, as well as the heroism and determination of those taking part, the real achievement of the Voortrekkers can be established.

There are many other poems which should be singled out for praise, but limitation of space prevents a more detailed treatment here. It is to be hoped that enough has been said to convey the real quality of this volume.

HOWARD SERGEANT

Visitations: Louis MacNeice (Faber, 10s. 6d.).

The Sinai Sort: Norman MacCaig (Hogarth Press, 12s. 6d.).

The Enemy in the Heart: T. H. Jones (Hart-Davis, 10s. 6d.).

ONE opens a new collection by an established poet with certain presentiments: expecting or dreading the first signs of staleness. They are not present this time. These witty, polished poems of MacNeice at fifty, make the entire Movement of younger witty polished poets so superfluous. For always there is depth beyond his urbane utterance, and a more primitive magic lurks behind the sophistication. Once again the range of his travels provides the occasion for much of his material: *Visit to Rouen, Return to Lahore, Beni Hasan, Wessex Guidebook, Donegal Triptych*.... There is a certain quality of restless energy about his work that brings vitality to a jaded form and enables him to handle a frivolous theme with aplomb. He achieves telling effects by extremely simple means. In the poem *House on a Cliff*, for example, where the rapid juxtaposition of scenes gives dimension to the total idea:

“Indoors the tang of a tiny oil lamp. Outdoors
The winking signal on the waste of sea.
Indoors the sound of the wind. Outdoors the wind.
Indoors the locked heart and the lost key.”

There are poems in this book which are more typical of what we have come to expect from this poet, but few which are more successful. If you have the *Collected Poems* you will want this collection, too.

There is no more vivid recorder of the Scottish landscape than MacCaig at his leisurely best, as in *Clach toll*, in this collection. But this kind of poem is very much in the minority here. Many of these poems are argumentative in tone, and some are merely talkative. A sense of discontent prevails, as though even while playing patience with a well-thumbed deck of questions from the series “O World, O Life, O Time,” MacCaig doubted the validity of what he is doing. Grounds for such doubt exist. The opening poem tastes of the morning after Apocalypse, and there are poems whose proper place remains the margin of the poet’s notebook. Had the philosophy bottle been locked away out of his reach, we should have had more to celebrate. For where the personal flavour of his thoughts lifts a common experience into the sharp focus of controlled verse, MacCaig triumphs every time. His casual precision of observation fused with blunt individual comment provide colourful poetry that derives from human experience and yet clearly manages to enlarge it.

It must be very irritating for young Welsh poets to have their work continually compared to that of Dylan Thomas. T. H. Jones differs in his rhythms and his attitude to God, but he rather invites such comparison by similar imagery and turns of phrase which are not determined by common landscape. Though his lyrical impetus is too often dissipated in a conventional Romantic concept, his own strength shows in a brief form of pithy lyric in which he does not allow himself much loose rein, and his verse is all the better for it. His objective treatment of passion commands respect.

W. PRICE TURNER

A Mortal Pitch: Vernon Scannell (Villiers Publications, 7s. 6d.).

Dark Landscape: Madge Hales (Chatto & Windus, 6s.).

The Stones of Troy: C. A. Trypanis (Faber, 10s. 6d.).

The Descent into the Cave: James Kirkup (O.U.P., 12s. 6d.).

A BRAVE quartet, this, with not a bad poet among 'em! There are, of course, a few bad poems; to expect otherwise would be a silly way of crying for the moon or sobbing for a satellite. Mr. Kirkup, in particular, includes in his book quite a few pieces he will undoubtedly jettison when he arrives at the inevitable terminus of his "Collected Poems." Yet these four books have given me more pleasure than any poetry I have read this year from living poets.

Mr. Scannell, one of the poets represented in *Mavericks*, has some fine work in this, his second collection. Poems like *Schoolroom on a Wet Afternoon*, *Gunpowder Plot*, *Life Story*, and *Waiting for the Night* contain enough social awareness, one would think, to satisfy the most Marxist of poetry-tasting art critics. Being a poet and not a propagandist, he does not shout and scream to draw attention to his involvement in the woe and weal of society; the fact is implicit in the poetry. Though, parenthetically, what relevance a declared social conscience has to the quality of poetry is beyond my comprehension, Berger and Caudwell notwithstanding. It is important only in the classification of *poets*.

For my part (and to hell and Moscow with all art critics) the poem that lingers in the memory like the thought of a cool drink on a hot afternoon is the Song that begins, "My winter love was silent", and has nothing at all to do with Good Citizenship.

The distinguishing features of Madge Hales's poetry are the intensity of her poetic concentration, the integrity of her search for verbal precision, and the compassion that informs her themes. Each poem is fashioned as carefully and as concentrically as a piece of sculpture and odd lines or verses seem lost when taken out of context. Her preoccupation is with the struggle for ascendancy

between body and soul, between flesh (procreating, animal) and spirit (eternally chaste). She is a worthy companion to Kathleen Raine, Anne Ridler and Ruth Pitter.

Professor Trypanis is a Greek writing in English and fascinated by the music of his adopted language. His poem, *Theonichis and Mnesarete*, the first piece in this, his second collection, is the most moving poem in the four volumes under review, and the title poem contains many exquisite portraits extracted from the author's beloved Iliad. His is a precious, a sheltered talent circumscribed by the conditions of his classical inheritance, yet producing poetry of real worth.

One imagines Mr. Kirkup roaming round his little world peering attentively at one inanimate object after another and muttering to himself: "What can I *do* next? Ashtray? Gramophone records? The window? Mirror? Done 'em all. Ah! How about having a go at the old kitchen sink!" Which he does.

His poetry is so pleasing, so professionally competent, so often good in its revelation of a uniquely careful vision of the everyday world, that one hesitates to suggest that he publishes too much, too easily. His poem about a Public Convenience is, unexpectedly, one of the best things in the book; his poem about the old kitchen sink strains our credulity to breaking point. *The Old Trousers* is a triumphant transformation of the personal into the universal; *Football Action Photographs* is a waste of bundling words. And yet, when all is said and done, what a finely fluent poet he is and how arid the poetic landscape would be without him, drains, dustbins and all!

B. EVAN OWEN

Poems 1943-1956: Richard Wilbur (Faber, 15s.).

The Green Wall: James Wright (Yale U.P. London, O.U.P. 20s.).

The One-Eyed Gunner: Robert Belooof (Villiers, 10s.).

RICHARD Wilbur is a very accomplished poet: his forms and versification are almost faultless and provide most gratifying reading. His wit and dancing vigour are balanced by a seriousness far from didacticism. Read his sparkling translation of the dialogue between Arsinoé and Célimène from Molière's *Misanthrope* (which translation, by the way, is from Scene 4, not Scene 5, of Act 3), one of the cattiest titillating scenes in the theatre. Read his epigrams, his amusing lyric from the comic opera version of *Candide*, his implied tributes to several French poets (how refreshing to find

Francis Jammes in the headlines after so long a silence), and marvel. It is possible to snort now and then, to point out where Hopkins has been over-noted, where Marianne Moore—yet he does not disguise these influences, admitting and moving on. His reading and appreciation are as wide as his travels, and his unobtrusive knowledge of other languages and literatures glints attractively through the twentieth-century American warp and weft. His faults are not so much those of the poet as of the present-day American in the world: an assurance near to arrogance, equivalent to that of the English in the eighteenth century; a brashness, a hint of violence in the undertones, an occasional “blam” of discord, the modernisation of old themes, “remembering lust and murder,” a gentle touch of debunkery (possibly to be preferred to humbuggery), and the “gestures of invincible prodigious honesties.”

Mr. Wright's book is the 53rd in the Yale Series of Younger Poets. It offers a foreword by W. H. Auden and 90 pages of quasi-Arlington-Robinson-Robert Frost, etc., verse at a cost of twenty shillings. The verse is rhymed and regular, with assonantal variations and no experiments. It is generally musical, full of girls, occasionally original in subject matter; finds uses for words as diverse as “dwellers” and “garage”; now and then touches whimsy; at times involves an odd sort of pity for persons who do not seem to deserve it (at least in a Wordsworthian or Hardy-esque sense); tumbles into Readers' Digest images such as

“Blundering autos lurch and swerve
On gravel, crawling on their knees
Around the unfamiliar curve —”

and is everywhere comprehensible and readable. If it is true that Mr. Wright has, as he says, “tried very hard to write” like this, then it is difficult to see how he can progress. This is a cul-de-sac.

Since Robert Beloof is partly concerned with the one-eyed gunner who shot at a sparrow and killed a robin, he may be well aware that he does not always hit his own target. His style is not yet fully formed, and such influences as Eliot and Pound stand out uncomfortably here and there in cadence and mannerism; his Memnon, for example, might almost be Sweeney. This is his first book, although titles and internal evidence go to prove that some of the poems in it date back fifteen years or so. He ranges widely for subjects. His eye is vivid, his senses alert, his wit polished and pointed: all that is lacking is the right method. There are yet too many words, and there are serious snags in the use of slang and neologisms which so soon will be out of date. In spite of his faults, he offers a very attractive collection: what motes there are

"Such notes are lovers, cast
Within each other's eye;
The silver sum of all
They've seen and let go by."

HUGH CREIGHTON HILL

Time's Beauty: Gideon Clark.

You, Neighbour God: I. M. Paterson.

A Shell in My Hand: Frances Harland.

The Green Landings of the Sun: Bryan Reed.

All from Outposts Publications, 2s. 6d.

STILL they come! Poet after poet, offering us tentatively and with humility the first collections of their verse, in an age that so often and so regularly spits in the face of the hope that is their inspiration. The opportunities provided by OUTPOSTS and other pamphlet series ensure that no poet worthy of the name need go unpublished, and the encouraging, most important result of all this activity is the disclosure of so many good young poets, lacking perhaps in technical skill and in the ability to reduce their intellectual, emotional and spiritual experiences to fit the compass of a single complete poem, but possessed of great potentialities.

It is unfortunate that none of the big literary journals is willing to find the space to notice and encourage this manifestation of poetic virility. The closed shop is not confined to trade unions.

Gideon Clark can paint a vivid word-picture in a few lines :

"Shaved by the burning edge of heat,
The smooth fields roll like yellow seas
Against the green-black woodland height :
Dark sultry clouds, a dazzled fleet
Of towered ships, criss-crossed with light,
Steam slowly towards their distant quays."

He occasionally strains too eagerly after his adjectives and metaphors and spoils the impact of his poetry with phrases like "The foaming vats of evening" or "The lightning's kiss of violet fire." The best poetry is in his two "Portraits", written with a sense of urgency and inevitability absent from the slighter pieces.

The title of I. M. Paterson's *You, Neighbour God* is taken from Rilke and the pamphlet is a verse sequence on the life of Christ from *Genesis* to *The Ascension*. No extract can convey the quiet passion of this lovely poem; it will stand reading again and again, and is a remarkable exercise in mystic, contemplative verse.

Technically, Mrs. Harland is the most complete poet of the four here considered. Each poem is a finished entity, rounded off and having its own unique significance. She only needs to increase the metaphorical complexity and the conveyed intensity of her work (a course of Donne?); good as these poems are, they are too easily forgotten.

The same could be said of Mr. Reed who asks "What can I give to the world but a word that fades?" He can write poetry that has everything except that indefinable quality that compels attention; his intellect must allow his heart more room, for his themes strike too few chords in universal experience.

B. EVAN OWEN

NOTICES

THE POETRY BOOK SOCIETY announces that its Autumn Choice is *The Hawk in the Sun* by Ted Hughes (Faber, 10s. 6d.), and its Autumn Recommendation is *The Collected Poems of Roy Campbell* (Bodley Head, 21s.).

POEMS INVITED. A national magazine experimenting with the publication of poetry for the first time has given the Editor of *Outposts* the task of selecting suitable material. Payment is exceptionally good. Poems of not more than 20 lines, and having a direct impact upon the reader, should be sent (together with a stamped addressed envelope) to Howard Sergeant at the *Outposts* address.